



Open Public Services White Paper

Consultation questions

Sitra response

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From:

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To:

The Cabinet Office
On-line consultation

The White Paper consultation questions are set out here in bold followed by Sitra's responses as bullet points.

Individual Services

How best, in individual services and on a case-by-case basis, can we ensure that people have greater choice between diverse, quality providers?

- Support provision of clear accessible information on services and their outcomes. Sitra has recently carried out consultation on the collection and use of data on Housing Related Support services and we refer you to our report on this to the Department for Communities and Local Government.
- Support sector based quality assurance systems, e.g. Quality Assessment Framework for Housing Related Support
- Recognise value of local self-help/peer-support and advocacy groups, advice agencies
- Adequately resource regulatory bodies such as the Care Quality Commission and the successor to Tenant Services Authority
- Encourage infrastructure and membership bodies to support good practice and foster service improvement
- Advise commissioners of negative impact of large scale competitive tendering processes which exclude recognition of social value and are driving out small local providers, in a number of areas replacing diversity with monopoly
- Recognise that frequent rounds of competitive tendering and the use of short term contracts are creating instability of provision while continuity of support is highly valued by service users.

Consistent with the Government's fiscal plans, what further opportunities exist to target funding to help the poorest, promote social mobility and provide fair access to public services?

- Protect funding for Housing Related Support and other preventative services for vulnerable & disadvantaged people in recognition of their lack of local political leverage
- Recognise the value of preventative (non-statutory) services and the savings they generate for statutory services in national spending plans and initiatives such as community budgeting

Are there additional areas where personal budgets would be appropriate and could existing initiatives on personal budgets be accelerated?

- No additional areas needed, allow existing initiatives to proceed with flexibility and allowance for users' own choices and pace

How can the principle be implemented that providers (from whichever sector) who are receiving public money for individual services should collect satisfaction data in a standardised form to enable comparison and put it into the public domain?

- Outcomes data is important as well as satisfaction data
- Sitra's work on Housing Related Support data collection found support for a national data collection framework which: uses COUNT principle and facilitates access to information for individual users/purchasers as well as performance monitoring and needs information for providers and commissioners; uses terms & language that enable read-across to related service sectors

How can we ensure that people are aware of, and can exercise, their right to choice effectively in specific services, through choice champions, choice prompts, data and a possible new role for Ombudsmen?

- For vulnerable & disadvantaged people - recognise need for funding for user led organisations, peer-support and advocacy groups and for advice agencies

What is the appropriate role for elected and unelected office-holders in championing individuals' ability to exercise choice and ensure accountability from service providers?

- For services for vulnerable & disadvantaged people - work with existing frameworks for regulation, monitoring and complaints

How can we ensure that our approach to opening public services protects and enhances accountability rather than dispersing it?

- Recognise the cost of accountability in national & local spending plans
- Support national data collection frameworks, e.g. for Housing Related Support as referred to above

Neighbourhood Services

What is the scope for neighbourhood councils to take greater control over local services?

- There is significant risk in this proposal in relation to services for vulnerable and disadvantaged people where this level of local government has very little experience or track record

What help will neighbourhood councils need to enable them to run any services devolved to them?

- No further comment to make

What would make it easier to establish new neighbourhood councils in areas where local people want them?

- No further comment to make

Do additional checks and balances need to be created to ensure proper financial control?

- No further comment to make

How can we improve the delegation and financial framework for neighbourhood councils?

- No further comment to make

How do we ensure appropriate accountability for services run by communities to ensure that those not involved directly are not disadvantaged?

- Vulnerable and disadvantaged people will be reliant on regulatory bodies, such as Care Quality Commission and the successor to the Tenant Service Authority, having sufficient resources to be able to enforce standards in services they need, and on advice agencies, user lead organisations and advocacy groups being adequately funded.

Commissioned services

What is the scope to extend and/or deepen the commissioning approach across public services?

- Question does not indicate which commissioning approach it refers to but intelligent commissioning should be based on evidence of the impact and achievements of different approaches
- The extension of competitive tendering to Housing Related Support, advice services and other welfare services has had a negative impact, driving out small local charitable organisations, so reducing choice, and adding considerably to provider and commissioner costs.

What further potential is there to decentralise central government commissioning to locally elected individuals and authorities?

- Programmes requiring national consistency of delivery/distribution would not be well suited to local commissioning
- Recognise the risks of different government departments' approaches to localism making local integration more difficult

To which areas should we apply the open commissioning policy?

- To those areas where local service users and commissioners, working in partnership, identify that current service delivery is unsatisfactory and alternative provision is required. Outsourcing, competitive procurement and payment by results contracts should be introduced where there is evidence they would achieve improvements in services and not for ideological reasons.

What else can government do to overcome any traditional boundaries between public service providers, which get in the way of solutions to people's needs?

- Demonstrate good joint working between central government departments, e.g. by ensuring that the research and pilot projects they commission take account of the work done in related sectors
- Support dissemination of good practice from local cross-boundary work such as community budgets and the predecessor total place budgets

How can we ensure that commissioners and providers are best held to account?

- Support provision of clear accessible information on services and their outcomes
- Adequately resource regulatory bodies such as the Care Quality Commission and the successor to Tenant Services Authority
- Recognise value of local user led organisations, peer-support and advocacy groups, advice agencies
- Encourage infrastructure and membership bodies to challenge poor practice

What new skills and training will commissioners need?

- Understanding of use of evidence and impact assessments in developing policies and approaches to commissioning
- Development of co-production with service users in commissioning
- Use of social and environmental as well as economic criteria in evaluation of proposals and approaches to service commissioning.

Diversity of provision

How can we stimulate more openness and innovation in public services through new types of provision?

- Encourage compliance with the Compact for VCS
- Support intelligent commissioning, taking account of social and environmental as well as economic criteria and reversing trends to short-termism by increasing contract lengths
- Support the development of co-production with service users

What more could we do to support and catalyse new enterprises (e.g. mutuals) spinning out from the public sector?

- Encourage compliance with the Compact for VCS
- Support intelligent commissioning, taking account of social and environmental as well as economic criteria and reversing trends to short-termism by increasing contract lengths
- Support the development of co-production with service users

Where and how should we extend autonomous status for public sector providers?

- Where there is actual evidence that this will improve services for users

How do we ensure a true level playing field between providers in different sectors?

- Set aside ideology-based assumptions about which sector is best at service delivery and use evidence to assess performance and value
- Take account of social and environmental as well as economic criteria in commissioning services
- Support provision of clear accessible information on services and their outcomes
- Adequately resource regulatory bodies such as the Care Quality Commission and the successor to Tenant Services Authority

How can we create new, more diverse types of provider out of public sector bodies?

- Take evidence based approach to assessing service provision
- Review and publish any evidence of benefits of new types of provision

How can we best enable external investors and public service providers (from all sectors) to combine their resources to improve public services?

- Support collaborative working instead of focusing on competition between providers
- Demonstrate good joint working between central government departments, e.g. by ensuring that the research and pilot projects they commission take account of the work done in related sectors
- Support dissemination of good practice from local cross-boundary work such as community budgets and the predecessor total place budgets

How could we best achieve our goal for more back-office services in central government to be provided independently and flexibly?

- No comment to make

How should government regularly review the barriers to entry and exit for providers?

- Support intelligent commissioning, based on use of evidence and impact assessments
- Receive and review reports from regulatory bodies such as the Care Quality Commission and the successor to Tenant Services Authority
- Note the importance of the outcome of current consultation on TUPE and pensions which is a significant issue for smaller providers

How can we ensure continuity of services, in particular for the most vulnerable users?

- Adequately resource regulatory bodies such as the Care Quality Commission and the successor to Tenant Services Authority
- Support provision of clear accessible information on services and their outcomes
- Ensure commissioning of services is based on broad social value criteria, not narrow cost cutting, in order to support sustainability of provision and the retention of small, local or specialist provider organisations.